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UH gets creative to curb drinking

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The University of Hawai'i is considering a range of remedies to curb underage and binge drinking on its Manoa campus, from a "three-strikes" policy that could result in a student's expulsion from the dormitories, to strengthening campus security by giving officers the power to write citations.

But the primary tools — at least in the short term — will be alcohol education and more late-night social activities to give students something else to do besides party.

The 19 proposals were created by a task force that has been meeting since January toward addressing drinking that one student said has become so much a part of dorm life that "it's almost expected at this point. Most kids do drink, but binge drinking is becoming a more prevalent problem," said Matt Savage, a 20-year-old dorm resident.

And binge drinking, he said, isn't just a problem for the people drinking.

"It's not only the ones who are partying, it's the kid next door who is trying to get to bed on time or it's someone else that runs into the drunk guest," he said yesterday.

The recommendations were to be made public today. They have already been presented to Manoa Chancellor Peter Englert, who will decide which options to implement.

Englert agreed with the task force that the problem needs to be approached from several different angles. "Some of the individual actions we have taken have not worked," he said.

Some of the recommendations could be implemented as early as the fall semester, but others will require further study. Some, like hiring an alcohol and drug education program coordinator or creating a student housing conduct coordinator, would require money.

Others, such as requiring dormitory residents to carry a picture identification or implementing a "three-strikes" policy, will require further input from student groups.

Also among the proposals is creating over-21 and under-21 dorms, with drinking allowed only in those where all residents are over 21 — and access limited to those dorms. Now, some dorms contain a mix of students over and under 21.

Another proposal would require underage students who want to live in the dorms to sign a waiver allowing the university to call their parents when there are significant disciplinary violations, such as physical or sexual assault, possession of a firearm or explosives, intimidation, or drug and alcohol violations.

The waiving of some of their federal privacy rights would also allow the university to contact parents when students are admitted to the hospital, have repeat drug and alcohol disciplinary violations and when health and safety factors are identified.

Although some dorm students bristle at the thought of waiving some of their privacy rights, Ron Cambra, associate dean of arts and science and task force coordinator, does not believe the waiver requirement or other rules would leave the university with empty dorm rooms.

"The simple fact of the matter is housing is really a critical part of student success on campus and if we think of it as a privilege and if we think of those who are not in compliance with the attitude that it's an educational culture, an educational community, there are 1,400 people on the waiting list waiting to get in," he said.

The task force was made up of staff, students, parents, security and community members who felt a need to address the problem, which has led to an increase in alcohol-related incidents, several instances of alcohol poisoning and the 2002 death of a student who mixed alcohol with methadone.

Dee Uwono, a residential life coordinator in the housing office, said late-night activities in the past have significantly reduced alcohol-related incidents. The problem is that students have been in charge of the programs, which have been a bigger undertaking than anticipated. "You need to get the administration involved, as well as the students," she said.

Parent Joanne Kagawa, whose daughter lived in the dorms for three years before moving back home this year, said the recommendations "will be great if they go ahead and really implement them."

To Kagawa, the major issue is security. "They need more security. They need to toughen up their force. They need the security cameras, if possible. The smart card (identification to track students) would be nice. But all those things are going to take funding, and it's going to be tough," she said.

Kagawa also likes the idea of the university contacting parents. "I think that would be a good thing," she said. "For me as a parent, I'd want to know if my kid was in serious trouble, like about to be kicked out. I'd want to know before it happened, so it can be addressed."

Joy Bounds, a legislative aide who helped lead the task force, thinks the recommendations will be hard to implement.

"I think it's going to be a real effort," she said. "I think they're really going to have to pull together as a university."

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Recommendations

A task force of University of Hawai'i administrators, staff, students and parents, police, military and other interested community members have come up with these recommendations to reduce underage and binge

drinking in the Manoa dormitories.

1. Hire an alcohol and drug education program coordinator.
2. Develop a Web-based interactive alcohol program.
3. Develop a social norm campaign project to shift perceptions of campus alcohol use.
4. Distribute a copy of UH-Manoa alcohol policies and enforcement strategies at New Student Orientation and through the athletic department to all student athletes.
5. Send a newsletter regarding monthly issues in student housing to all parents and friends groups.
6. Develop an ID picture policy for the student housing area.
7. Make Hale Noelani available to continuing students 20 years and younger, except for freshmen.
8. Divide Hale Wainani into two separate areas — the low-rise apartments as wellness halls for students 21 and over and the Wainani high-rise apartments for residents who are of legal drinking age.
9. Implement a campus police office, or invest campus security with additional powers and responsibilities, including the issuance of citations.
10. Implement a three-strikes policy.
11. Begin a periodic review and upgrade of all UH-Manoa Student Housing Services alcohol policies.
12. Create a student housing conduct coordinator.
13. Obtain a system-wide judicial database.
14. Establish a parental notification system consistent with federal and state privacy laws.
15. Address compliance with the enforcement of the underage drinking law on campus.

16. Enforce stricter social host law enforcement policies on campus.

17. Develop an Office of Late Night Activities Program.

18. Expand University Health Services to a 24-hour operation.

19. Appoint a UH Drug and Alcohol task force.

Source: University of Hawai'i

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